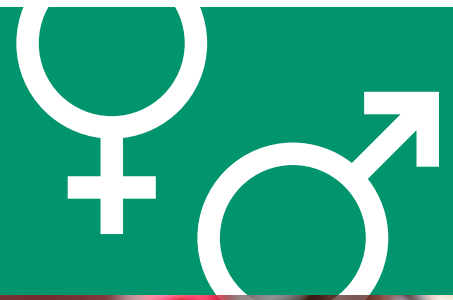




Knowledge Briefs on **Gender** and **CRVS**



Brief 3, Paper 4

Learnings from the Knowledge Brief Series on Gender and CRVS

Photo: Sarah Farhat / World Bank

KEY MESSAGES

- **CRVS systems have a disproportionately positive impact on women and girls.** Because gender inequalities restrict women's and their children's access to civil registration and legal documentation, it is crucial that policymakers adopt a gender lens to inform improvements to their CRVS systems.
- **CRVS systems play a critical role in helping countries measure and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** by producing sex-disaggregated demographic data. Despite the clear need and importance of strong CRVS systems, coverage and completeness remain poor in many low- and middle-income countries.
- **A life course approach to CRVS – from birth to death – is needed to ensure visibility and legal rights for women.** Monitoring sex-disaggregated vital statistics from birth to death, including marriage and divorce, is essential to identify gender inequalities. This is particularly true for women in low- and middle-income countries, specifically migrant women, refugees, and asylum seekers.
- **Linking CRVS systems with national identity (ID) systems can enable women and girls to exercise their political, social, and economic rights.** When connected and supported by appropriate legal and institutions frameworks, these systems can help create a universal, inclusive ID system.

- **The global community can draw from initiatives that rebalance CRVS systems for women and children.** Coordination between CRVS systems and the health sector can improve vital events registration. There is a need to reduce barriers, such as cost and location, and to work with communities to change social norms and cultural practices that hamper the population's uptake of registration services. Such coordination could contribute to improved knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the population towards vital events registration.

INTRODUCTION

Through the *Knowledge Briefs on Gender and CRVS*, the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) seeks to inspire a global commitment to integrating gender analysis across activities that strengthen CRVS systems. Created in partnership with Open Data Watch, the series compiles key findings on available solutions to existing challenges and identifies priorities for research and action. This series is part of the Centre of Excellence's mandate to support national efforts to develop, strengthen, and scale up CRVS systems by brokering access to technical assistance, global standards and tools, evidence, and good practices.

The Knowledge Brief Series provides strong case studies that explore what is needed to overcome the barriers facing women and girls. It addresses challenges within the unique political and cultural contexts of countries around the world, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Finally, it supports the growing recognition of the importance of strong CRVS systems and seeks to provide the evidence needed to address gender barriers and inequalities. This paper is part of the final brief in the series. It provides an overview of the core messages explored across the other 11 papers.

Despite the many benefits to governments and individuals, CRVS systems are chronically weak in low- and middle-income countries. They often overlook gender dimensions. Robust CRVS systems provide data that is disaggregated by sex, age, geography, and other relevant characteristics. They also protect *everyone's* fundamental rights and freedoms. But given that gender inequalities mean many women (and consequently their children) are denied access to registration services and the associated benefits, strengthening the gender dimensions of CRVS systems holds enormous power for unlocking the rights and freedoms of women and girls, in particular. By recording vital events such as births, marriages, divorces, and deaths with their causes, these systems provide critical documents that enable women to secure a legal identity and access essential social services. Furthermore, the reliable, real-time data produced by CRVS systems equips decision-makers with the information they need to design and implement policies that address the unique needs of vulnerable groups, including women and girls.

The population data drawn from civil registration is also an important source of gender statistics required to monitor and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the heart of the SDGs is a commitment to achieve gender equality and empower women and children, girls in particular, by eliminating discrimination against women. However, there is not enough data to inform or measure efforts that address the challenges facing women and girls. According to the World Bank, more than 100 developing countries still do not have functioning CRVS systems that support the complete registration of vital events, resulting in critical gaps in the availability of reliable statistics (World Bank 2018). Without the right data, disaggregated at the right levels of detail, there is no way to monitor who is being left behind.

This series reflects the Centre of Excellence's strong commitment to advancing CRVS systems that protect, count, and empower everyone – including those most at risk of being left behind – in support of the SDGs. This initiative integrates current research evidence and builds on the results of previous technical meetings. On 26 February 2018, the Centre of Excellence and its partners hosted a high-level panel and technical consultation sessions on CRVS and gender through an event entitled "Making the Invisible Visible: CRVS as a Basis to Meeting the 2030 Gender Agenda." This was the first meeting to facilitate conversations focused on the gender dimensions of CRVS systems and the barriers women and girls face in accessing them. It provided an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders – including civil registrars, statisticians, development practitioners, public health experts, and gender experts – to connect, discuss challenges, and develop initiatives to address barriers to CRVS systems.



Photo: Dominic Chavez / World Bank



Photos: Dominic Chavez/World Bank

BRIEF 1: MAKING THE CASE FOR CRVS SYSTEMS

The first set of papers in the Knowledge Brief Series provides a detailed introduction to the gendered dimensions of CRVS systems and their impact on gender-related SDGs, financing, and capacity building. Strong CRVS systems have a disproportionately positive impact on women and girls, as they eliminate gender inequalities that prevent women and girls from accessing civil registration and legal documentation. To improve CRVS systems, decision-makers should adopt a gender lens to guide decisions and produce sex-disaggregated demographic data. Despite the clear need for CRVS systems to be universal and complete, CRVS systems in many countries do not capture vital event information for their entire population.

The four papers included in the first knowledge brief are:

- **Making the Invisible Visible: How Strong CRVS Systems Can Empower Women and Girls;**
- **Leaving No One Behind: CRVS, Gender, and the SDGs;**
- **Harnessing CRVS Systems for the Gender-Related SDGs: Opportunities and Challenges;** and
- **The Costs and Benefits of CRVS as a Tool for Women's Empowerment.**

The need for registration

Globally, 166 million children under age 5, or 1 in 4, remain unregistered ([UNICEF 2019](#)). And while gender inequalities in birth registration may appear small across most countries, averages may mask these inequalities. Sub-national data reveals particular settings where the births of girls are under-registered. Birth certificates help ensure access to essential services, protect against child marriage, and provide a legal underpinning for identification.

In addition, estimates indicate that half of all deaths around the world are not properly documented, and that women's deaths may be systematically under-registered. The lack of data on death can leave gender-related health challenges unaddressed.

CRVS data is needed to achieve the SDGs

Vital statistics produced by CRVS systems serve as a basic building block for gender data, informing efforts to monitor and achieve the SDGs. Gender equality is a fundamental issue that underpins at least 54 gender-related indicators within the SDG framework. Disaggregated data is essential in the effort to 'leave no one behind.'

CRVS systems represent a critical source of administrative data to close gaps for the SDGs. CRVS data can be used to construct national population registers to address the lack of data (Muñoz n.d.; WHO 2012). Universal coverage in a CRVS system captures a country's population and demographics, which provide numerators and denominators for SDG indicators.

Investment will lead to significant benefits

Building and maintaining robust CRVS systems to meet the data needs of policymakers and the SDGs will require an increased investment, which is well worth the cost given the benefits. To build CRVS systems in 77 of the world's poorest countries, a conservative estimate shows that US\$1.5 billion (matched by equal domestic funding) is needed, which represents 1 percent of current official development assistance (SDSN 2015; Gurría 2018). The scaling up of CRVS systems requires investment, and can offer significant benefits for protection, economic growth, political participation, and women's empowerment.

A functioning CRVS system provides the legal foundation for identification, which allows for the financial participation of women and other excluded populations. This leads to significant impacts on tax revenue, better access to bank accounts and other financial services, and savings through improved efficiencies. Stronger CRVS systems are also the foundation for increased political participation. After all, the lack of legal identification significantly limits political engagement and people's ability to vote.

When accurate and disaggregated population counts are available, government can be much more efficient, since the data provide indicators that can help inform policies that address a wide range of challenges, such as health, education, and other issues.

Concrete action is needed to improve political understanding, knowledge, attitudes and practices of the populations, and support for statistics produced through CRVS systems. Further documented examples are needed to illustrate the benefits of improved CRVS systems and to build support for prioritizing resources. To increase the use and usability of data, it is important to build technical capacity and improve data literacy within governments and among citizens. Efforts to increase the uptake of available data will help close the gap between production and use. Incorporating a gender lens into any program to improve CRVS systems will ensure that women and children reap the benefits.



Photos: Mohamad Al-Arief / World Bank (top left);
Dominic Chavez / World Bank (top right, bottom left);
John Isaac / World Bank (bottom right)

BRIEF 2: IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

The second set of papers in the Knowledge Brief Series moves beyond the case for strengthening CRVS systems in support of gender equality to discussing specific barriers and proposing concrete solutions and actions. Case studies from China, Morocco, and Syria highlight the gender consequences of CRVS exclusion and advocate for a life course approach to CRVS systems, which encompasses all vital events from birth to death, including marriage and divorce. An additional case study featuring Guinea explains how social norms and weak systems combine to create gender barriers to CRVS systems. The brief also promotes linking ID and CRVS systems to help ensure that no one is left behind. It proposes other concrete solutions to overcome gender-based barriers to registration.

The four papers included in the second knowledge brief are:

- **The Life-Course Approach to Civil Registration and Vital Statistics: A Crucial Tool to Advance Gender Equality;**
- **Gender Equity in Guinea: How Social Norms Affect the Civil Registration of Women and Girls in West Africa;**
- **Linking National ID and CRVS Systems: An Imperative for Inclusive Development;** and
- **Empowering Women and Girls Through Civil Registration Systems.**

Barriers to civil registration in China, Morocco, and Syria

The absence of a life course approach to CRVS systems results in significant impacts on women's legal rights and their visibility. Three case studies illustrate the problem and highlight the disproportionate impact of non-registration on women and girls.

China—In China, sex selective delays in birth registration have created social protection risks for women and girls. Delayed registration of female births may account for up to 73 percent of China's skewed sex ratio, with sex selective abortion and infant mortality accounting for 27 percent ([Shi and Kennedy 2016](#)).

Morocco—In rural Morocco, female deaths are systematically under-registered. Death registration serves as the primary source of mortality statistics, so this lack of data misinforms evidence-based public health interventions to improve women's health.

Syrian refugees—Among Syrian refugees, under-registration of marriage can impact the registration of future vital events, given that registering one vital event often requires supporting documents from other vital events. Marriage registration is particularly important, as women often need a marriage certificate to register a birth in a host country.

Challenges for women and girls in Guinea

In Guinea, a wide range of social and system-related barriers prevent women from accessing the benefits of CRVS systems. These barriers create challenges for women and include:

- Problems accessing services and exercising their civil rights;
- Legal inconsistencies among stakeholders (UNICEF 2019);
- Logistical challenges;
- Complex, expensive processes for registering marriages and deaths;
- Distance to civil registration centres;
- Lack of incentives to officially register vital events;
- Limited knowledge of the importance of registration;
- Patriarchal resistance to registration; and
- Social and cultural norms.

Religious considerations are very strong for Guinea's large Muslim population, and religious ceremonies around vital events prevail over civil proceedings. These barriers and the overall lack of empowerment women experience in Guinea result in the systematic under-registration of vital events, particularly for women.

Improving access by linking CRVS and ID systems

Linking CRVS and identity (ID) systems is critical to empowering women because it improves access to basic services for women and the poor, who face greater exclusion. More than 1 billion people worldwide do not have an official proof of identity; while the global gender gap in identity coverage is less than 2 percent, it is much larger among unregistered populations (World Bank 2018). This deprives them of political, social, and

economic rights. Linking national ID registers with data from CRVS systems can help create a universal, inclusive ID system.

To be effective and link with other systems, CRVS systems must be permanent, complete, accurate, and efficient. Business processes adopted in linking these two systems must be efficiently supported by adequate human resources, digitization and technology infrastructure, institutional mechanisms, and legal frameworks. Although recent and ongoing global and regional initiatives are yielding improvements to both systems, there is still much to do.

Solutions to strengthen CRVS systems

The importance of strengthening CRVS systems is clear. Women and children face a vicious cycle of exclusion from civil registration, which blocks them from accessing legal identification and crucial services. With the support of the global community, solutions are needed to overcome gender-based barriers to registration, including:

- Delegating responsibilities to the local level, closer to where women live and work, to overcome the time and distance barriers to registration;
- Involving healthcare workers who have the greatest access to women in the process to increase access and facilitate registration of vital events;
- Eliminating the high cost of registration and certificates and making them free of charge; and
- Addressing gender-based norms, supply side constraints, structural inequalities, and their underlying social and economic determinants.

Overlooking these important issues will result in poor service design and delivery.



Photos: Kenneth Pornillos / World Bank (top left);
Peter Kapuscinski / World Bank (top right);
Dominic Chavez / World Bank (bottom left);
Sarah Farhat / World Bank (bottom right)

BRIEF 3: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

The third set of papers in the Knowledge Brief Series takes a deep dive into best practices and key challenges for national governments and the international community. A case study from the Philippines provides a positive example of a strong CRVS system, along with key actions needed to develop a similar system. Two fictional examples from Kenya and the Philippines highlight the struggles their marginalized populations face in navigating CRVS systems due to their unique circumstances. Another explores how CRVS systems' death and cause of death reporting highlight significant inequalities, even in high-functioning systems. In each case, authors recommend concrete solutions to the challenges discussed.

The four papers included in the third knowledge brief, in addition to this one, are:

- **Making CRVS Systems Work for Women and Children: A Country Perspective;**
- **From Cradle to Grave: Documenting the Footprints of Vulnerable Women Through Life;**
- **The Dangers of Gender Bias in CRVS and Cause of Death Data: The Path to Health Inequality;** and
- **Learnings from the Knowledge Brief Series on Gender and CRVS** (this paper).

Making CRVS systems work for women and children

Strengthening CRVS systems must be a government priority, so it is critical to understand the country perspective and the unique challenges that exist. The first paper in this brief explores how the Philippines made CRVS systems work for women and children. It also lists key steps that enable a CRVS system to generate sex-disaggregated statistics and to provide women and children with documents that prove relationships and civil status.

The Philippines implemented a legal framework that ensures that the CRVS system recognizes women and children's needs, and a clear governance structure that connects CRVS and identity (ID) systems. The country's decentralized structure reduces barriers and captures the full life cycle of women and girls. The *General Appropriations Act* ensures adequate, sustainable funding for the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) to enable service delivery.

Key actions for improving CRVS systems should include enlisting the support of a wide range of champions to help craft laws, secure sustainable resources, and maintain the integrity of the system.

Underlying all of this, a CRVS system must build and maintain the trust of its stakeholders to help ensure that they recognize and support the value of the system, as well as the documents and information it generates. While each country will experience its own challenges, the Philippines case study provides insights that can be applied to other contexts.

Gender and CRVS from cradle to grave

Women and girls from marginalized populations worldwide struggle to navigate CRVS systems due to a broad range of circumstances. This further amplifies their vulnerability. This next paper shines a spotlight on some of the interrelated CRVS policy, human rights, and practical issues between gender and CRVS. It presents two fictional profiles of women in Kenya and the Philippines using empirical and anecdotal evidence.

The Kenya example explores the challenges of struggling to be counted while stateless. Members of the Pemba, Warundi, and Shona groups are not recognized as citizens. While the government has been taking steps to make improvements, statelessness blocks women and girls from registering births, marriages, divorces, or deaths.

The Philippines example highlights the difficulties related to balancing Indigenous culture with the modern state. Members of remote Indigenous groups have access to CRVS systems, but still face barriers due to distance, money, and traditional customs. These examples show that when CRVS documents and processes consider contextual circumstances, they can be empowering tools for vulnerable women and girls.

The dangers of gender bias in CRVS and cause of death data

Worldwide, there is evidence of inequalities in health outcomes for women and men. CRVS systems can help countries understand these inequalities by providing data on the number and causes of death. This produces evidence to help countries identify and understand the mortality patterns of diverse groups over time. However, the quality of cause of death reporting for women is worse than it is for men, even in countries with strong CRVS systems. Further, gender bias in the health system may influence the quality of this reporting because reporting codes lack sufficient specificity or detail. More research is needed to answer fundamental questions about how causes of death are recorded in CRVS systems and how reporting differs for men and women.

CRVS systems also play a critical role in documenting and exposing gender-based violence – intimate partner violence, in particular. However, these same systems consistently underestimate the number of women killed by an intimate partner. Current classification in CRVS systems makes it almost impossible to produce robust estimates of intimate partner violence fatalities. These shortcomings highlight the urgent need to strengthen death and cause of death reporting.

NEXT STEPS

The collection of papers in the Knowledge Brief Series covers a wide range of CRVS and gender dimensions, highlighting good practices and proposing solutions to overcome barriers. The case studies and concrete examples help build a case for the link between CRVS and gender.

Building on the insights and evidence compiled across these knowledge briefs, the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems, Open Data Watch, and the United Nations Population Fund are teaming up to host a second global conversation on the gender dimensions of CRVS systems. The *ConVERGE: Connecting Vital Events Registration and Gender Equality* conference will be held at the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa 25–26 February 2020. This gathering of experts, country representatives, youth, and donor agencies will move discussions beyond the importance of CRVS systems for women and children to focus on operationalizing action-oriented solutions, investing in research, and implementing agreed-upon actions. It is hoped that this second conference will catalyze commitment from the community of practice to address the gender dimensions of CRVS systems, as well as ensure that CRVS system strengthening continues to be seen as a global development priority given the power of these systems for unlocking gender equality.



This paper was authored by Irina Dincu and Kristin Corbett of the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems. It is part of the Knowledge Brief Series on Gender and CRVS developed by the Centre of Excellence for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Systems, in partnership with Open Data Watch.

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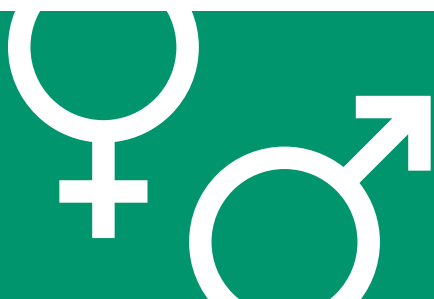
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